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NOTES

ON THE

ANÆSTHETIC EFFECTS

OF

CHLORIDE OF HYDROCARBON, NITRATE OF ETHYLE, BENZIN,
ALDEHYDE, AND BISULPHURET OF CARBON.

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ON THE ANÆSTHETIC EFFECTS OF CHLORIDE OF HYDROCARBON, NITRATE OF ETHYLE, BENZIN, ALDEHYDE, AND BISULPHURET OF CARBON.

DURING the last few months two or three different substances have been brought forward as anæsthetic agents ; but our medical journals have afforded little or no detailed notice of their effects. The few following notes, however imperfect, may not therefore be uninteresting ; more particularly as they are the result of direct experiments upon myself and others with the agents in question. In most of these experiments, I had the kind and able assistance of Dr Keith and Dr Duncan.

When first publishing, in November last, upon the anæsthetic properties of Chloroform, I stated that, "in making a variety of experiments upon the inhalation of different volatile chemical liquids, I have, in addition to perchloride of formyle, breathed chloride of hydrocarbon, acetone, nitrate of oxide of ethyle, benzin, the vapour of iodoform, &c. I may probably (I added) take another opportunity of describing the result."—(See *Lancet* for 20th November 1847, p. 549.)

Three of the substances which I named in the preceding list, produce, when inhaled, a state of anæsthetic insensibility :—viz. chloride of hydrocarbon, nitrate of oxide of ethyle, and benzin.

CHLORIDE OF HYDROCARBON.

Chloride of Hydrocarbon, or *Dutch liquid*, as it is often termed in consequence of it being first discovered by the Dutch chemists of the last century, is one of the various fluids to which the name of *Chloric Ether* was for some time given.

When equal parts of olefiant gas and chlorine are mixed together, the two gases rapidly disappear, and produce a colourless oily liquid, of a peculiar sweetish taste and ethereal odour. Its specific gravity is 1.247. It boils at 148° . It is composed of four atoms of carbon, four of hydrogen, and two of chlorine. Hence its formula is $C_4 H_4 Cl_2$.

When its vapour is inhaled, the chloride of hydrocarbon causes so great irritation of the throat, that few can persevere in breathing it for such a length of time as to induce anæsthesia. I have latterly, however, seen it inhaled perseveringly until this state, with all its usual phenomena, followed; and without excitement of the pulse, or subsequent headach. When I myself attempted to inhale the chloride of hydrocarbon, it produced an extreme degree of acrid irritation in the throat, which did not disappear entirely for many hours afterwards.

NITRATE OF ETHYLE.

When two parts of alcohol, and one part of pure nitric acid, are distilled together, with the addition of a small quantity of urea, *Nitrate of Ethyle*, or, more properly, *Nitrate of Oxide of Ethyle*, is produced. It is a transparent colourless liquid, with a sweet taste, and very agreeable odour. Its specific gravity is 1.112; it boils at 185° . It is a compound of four proportions of carbon, five of hydrogen, six of oxygen, and one of nitrogen; and its formula is, $(C_4 H_5) O, NO_5$; or $Ac O, NO_5$.

Nitrate of ethyle is easy and pleasant to inhale, and possesses very rapid and powerful anæsthetic properties. A small quantity, such as fifty or sixty drops, when sprinkled on a handkerchief and inhaled, produces insensibility after a few inspirations. But during the brief period which elapses before the state of complete anæsthesia is induced, the sensations of noise and fulness in the head are in general excessive; and much headach and giddiness have usually followed its employment, and persisted for some time.

BENZIN.

Benzin or *Benzole* was first discovered by Faraday, as one of the products in his experiments on compressing oil gas, and was designated by him *Bicarburet of Hydrogen*. Mitscherlich afterwards obtained it by distilling, at a high temperature, benzoic acid with an excess of slaked lime.

It is a clear colourless liquid, of a peculiar ethereal odour; with a specific gravity, of 0.85; and boils at 186° . It is believed to be composed of two proportions of carbon and one of hydrogen. Its formula is, $C_2 H$; or perhaps, more properly, $C_{12} H_6$. It is polymeric with the hypothetical radical formyle.

In my experiments with benzin I found it capable of producing anæsthesia; but the ringing and noises in the head accompanying and following its inhalation, were so excessive, and almost intoler-

able in the case of myself and others, as to seem to us to render its practical applications impossible, even had there been no other objections to its use. Latterly, Dr Snow has tried its employment upon some patients for tooth-drawing; and in one instance of amputation. In this last case it produced convulsive tremors.—(*Lancet* for 12th February 1848, p. 180.)

ALDEHYDE.

Aldehyde, or Hydrate of Oxide of Acetyle, was first noticed by Dœbereiner in distilling together sulphuric acid, alcohol, and peroxide of manganese; but it was left for Liebig to fix and determine every thing about its chemical nature. It is a colourless limpid liquid, of specific gravity 0.791. It is very volatile, boiling at 72°. It spontaneously changes when long kept, and is converted into two substances, a solid and a fluid, metaldehyde and elaldehyde. Liebig found it to be composed of four atoms of carbon, four atoms of hydrogen, and two of oxygen; and its formula is $C_4 H_3 O + aq.$

Professor Poggiale of Paris, has lately made some experiments with dogs on the inhalation of the vapour of aldehyde, and from these has concluded that its anæsthetic effects will be found more prompt and energetic than those of sulphuric ether or chloroform. It certainly possesses, like some of the preceding agents, well-marked anæsthetic properties; but it assuredly will never come into use, as very few will be found capable of inhaling a sufficient dose of its vapour. In fact, out of five of us that attempted to inhale aldehyde, very carefully prepared and purified, four were driven to suspend the respiration of it in consequence of the coughing and insufferable feelings of dyspnœa which it immediately induced. The sensations of difficult respiration and constriction in the chest which the vapour produced, resembled precisely those of a severe fit of spasmodic asthma. In the fifth case, the experimentalist, after perseveringly breathing the aldehyde for a minute or two, became entirely insensible; the state of anæsthesia lasted for two or three minutes; during it, the pulse became excessively small and feeble. On recovering, the bronchial constriction and coughing, which had disappeared as the anæsthesia was induced, returned immediately, and was annoying for some time.

BISULPHURET OF CARBON

Bisulphuret of Carbon, or Alcohol of Sulphur (as it was at first termed), was accidentally discovered in 1796 by Lampadius, when experimenting on iron pyrites. Different opinions of its composition were held by different chemists; but Berzelius and Marcet, in 1813, at last fully confirmed the previous idea of Clement and Desormes, Vauquelin, &c., that it consisted only of sulphur and carbon. It is composed of two atoms of the former to one of the latter; consequently its formula is $C S_2$.

The most easy method of procuring it is by transmitting the vapour of sulphur over fragments of charcoal heated to redness in a closed porcelain or iron tube. The resulting bisulphuret of carbon, when purified by distillation, is a clear, colourless liquid, of a pungent taste. Its specific gravity is 1.272. It is very volatile, boiling at 108°.

It has been stated in various literary journals, that bisulphuret of carbon has lately been used as an anæsthetic agent at Christiana; but no particulars regarding its employment in Norway have, as far as I know, been yet published.

I have breathed the vapour of bisulphuret of carbon, and exhibited it to about twenty other individuals, and it is certainly a very rapid and powerful anæsthetic. One or two stated that they found it even more pleasant than chloroform; but in several it produced depressing and disagreeable visions, and was followed for some hours by headach and giddiness, even when given only in small doses. In one instance I exhibited it, with Mr Miller's permission, to a patient, from whom he removed a tumour of the mamma. It very speedily produced a full anæsthetic effect; but it was difficult to regulate it during the operation. The patient was restless in the latter part of it; but felt nothing. Like several others when under it, her eyes remained wide open. After the operation she was extremely sick, with much and long-continued headach; and, for fifty or sixty hours subsequently, her pulse was high and rapid, without rigor or symptoms of fever.

I tried its effects in a case of midwifery, in presence of Dr Weir, Dr Duncan, Mr Norris, and a number of the pupils of the Maternity Hospital. It was employed at intervals during three quarters of an hour. The patient was easily brought under its influence, a few inspirations sufficing for that purpose; but it was found altogether impossible to produce by it the kind of continuous sleep attending the use of chloroform. Its action was so strong, that when given, as a pain threatened or commenced, it immediately affected the power of the uterine contractions, so as often to suspend them; and yet its effects were so transient that the state of anæsthesia had generally passed off within a minute or two afterwards. The patient anxiously asked for it at the commencement of each pain. During its use she was occasionally sick, and vomited several times. Latterly her respiration became rapid, and her pulse rose extremely high. I then changed the inhalation for chloroform, and, under it, the patient slept quietly on for twenty minutes, when the child was born. During these twenty minutes there was no more sickness or vomiting, and the pulse gradually sunk down to its natural standard. A few minutes after the child was expelled, and while the mother still slept, her pulse was counted at 80. Next day the mother and infant were both well, and she has made a good recovery.

While these experiments prove the strong anæsthetic properties of

bisulphuret of carbon, they at the same time show its disadvantages. I have not alluded to another strong drawback upon its use, viz., its very unpleasant odour. "It has (says Dr Gregory) a peculiarly offensive smell of putrid cabbage."—(*Outlines of Chemistry*, p. 130.) By dissolving various essential oils in the bisulphuret I tried to overcome this disagreeable defect, but without much success.

None of the five anæsthetics which I have mentioned in the present communication are, I believe, comparable with chloroform or sulphuric ether, either in their manageableness or in their effects. And the after-consequences which all of them tend to leave, are too severe and too frequent to admit of their introduction into practice. They are more interesting physiologically than therapeutically.

EDINBURGH, *March* 20, 1848.



